



A Gender Analysis of the 2017 Lebanese Electoral Law

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Introduction

In Lebanon's parliament of 128 members, only 6 women were elected for the term 2018-2022 (4.7%).¹ In today's caretaker cabinet of 24 ministers, 6 are also women (30%). Almost half a century after women were granted their right to vote and stand as candidates in election (1952), these numbers demonstrate that women's political participation in Lebanon continues to fall dramatically short of targets agreed to by the Government of Lebanon under the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).

Despite being the first country in the Arab region to grant women their voting and candidacy rights in 1952, Lebanon sits today among the bottom of global indexes on women's participation in politics, ranking 147th out of 149 countries in the World Economic Forum's political empowerment pillar of its gender gap index. This is despite the power of women's rights actors and a feminist struggle in Lebanon.

The strength of this struggle was clear throughout the demonstrations that began on October 17th, 2019, where women and women's issues were at the forefront. Feminist demands were an integral part of the movement and represented the demands of both male and women activists, with such demands no longer limited to feminist forums and becoming a matter of national concern. In addition, the extent of women's participation attracted local and international media, shedding light on the role women play in social change and democracy in Lebanon.

However, national data and statistics reveal clear and wide qualitative gender gaps across many aspects of Lebanese society. In the public sector, while women make up 45% of all public administration positions, they account for only 21% of grade-1 positions². Within local politics,

Lebanese women account for only 4.54% of members of Municipal Councils.

While there was initial optimism with the adoption of the most recent parliamentary electoral law (2017) on its ability to support and increase the number of women in parliament, this has not been realized. The number of women candidates did increase significantly compared to previous elections, and the number of female elected leaders increased minimally. However, overall the law continues to pose significant challenges to women's participation and does not provide for any temporary special measures to increase women's representation, despite efforts to call for a gender quota.

With three sets of elections planned for 2022 in Lebanon (Presidential, Parliamentary and Municipal), this research paper aims to explore the current electoral law from a gendered perspective, to provide recommendations for reform. It also explores other factors that prevent women from running for elected positions on a footing equal to men. It was produced by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) in cooperation with the following partner associations and organizations, and represents a consensus position for gender and electoral reform.

- **Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities**
- **Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering**
- **Arab Institute for Human Rights - Lebanon Branch**
- **Health Care Society of Lebanon**
- **Musawah Association**
- **Loubnaniyoun**
- **Research and Training on Development-Action**
- **Madanyat**
- **Maharat Foundation**
- **Fifty Fifty**
- **Helem**
- **Ondes**

¹ This number has since dropped to 5 after one resigned in 2020 in response to the Beirut port explosion, along with 7 other MPs (3.9%).

² As part of a workshop held by the Lebanese League for Women in Business in 2019, the Head of the Civil Service Council, Nisrine Machmouchi, published these numbers.

- The Arab Institute of Women (LAU)
- The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women in Lebanon
- Women for Lebanon

For this purpose, the paper starts by reviewing women's political participation in Lebanon in

general, based on the available studies on this topic. It then discusses the electoral law, its articles and the application of its articles based on the outcome, and women's experiences, in the 2018 election. It further explores challenges women face within Lebanon's current established political parties. It ends with forward looking recommendations, with an eye to the planned elections for 2022.



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Section One

An Overview of Women's Political Participation and Activism in Lebanon

The Lebanese constitution³ does not explicitly prohibit discrimination between men and women; it states that all citizens shall have equal rights and obligations. Yet, although Lebanese women constitute more than half of the electorate, they are significantly underrepresented within the parliament and cabinet, and in public institutions, political parties and unions.

This section attempts to shed light on the various aspects of this reality. It reviews the main historical events that marked the political struggle of Lebanese women; examines the statistics on women's political participation; and discusses the role that women play in civil society to advocate for change and greater representation.

Historical Events

The Lebanese feminist protest movement had a prominent role in the period leading up to, during, and following the nation-wide demonstrations which started on 17 October 2019. This follows decades-long feminist activism for equal rights and justice.

During the Lebanese movement for independence in 1943, women participated alongside men in demonstrations calling for Lebanon's independence. Some demonstrations were organized and led by women. In 1952, after decades of the public sector being monopolized

by men, educated women were finally granted the right to vote and to stand as candidates at all levels of government. A year later following public pressure, all women with and without formal education were granted the right to vote and run for parliamentary elections in 1953. Ten years later, in 1963, Myrna Bustani made history when she became the first female member of Parliament in Lebanon (replacing her father, finishing his term, after his death in a car crash).

It was then not until 2004 that two women were appointed as government ministers. Leila Al Solh was appointed Minister of Industry and Wafaa Hamza as Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs. This led to more women being appointed to ministerial positions in the following years. In 2021, there are six women ministers in cabinet, including the Minister for Defense. Women make up 30% of cabinet members. However, despite these changes, Lebanon has yet to adopt special temporary measures, such as gender quotas, as have been established in other countries as way to strengthen and assure women's meaningful political participation⁴.

To date most women who have become members of parliament have succeeded in doing so through political inheritance, which is sometimes also described as tribal or feudal succession. This sees women take over a parliamentary seat from a male relative and then holding the position until they pass it to another male relative. This has led to commonly used expression "Lebanese women enter the Parliament dressed in black"⁵.

³ The constitution also stipulates that Lebanon is committed to international covenants at the forefront since it is a founding and active member of the United Nations Organization and abides by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also stipulates, in its articles, that every Lebanese has the right to hold public office without preference of one over another except for merit and competence as per the provisions provided for by the law.

⁴ Lebanese Women Over the Past 100 Years: We are up to the Challenge (اللبنانيات على امتداد 100 عام: نحن لها), Daraj, <https://bit.ly/34GSvXg>

⁵ Pascale Boutros, What are the reasons behind women's failure to play their role in political life? (ما هي أسباب تخلف المرأة؟) (اللبنانية عن دورها في الحياة السياسية؟), Al Joumhouria Newspaper, March 2015, <https://bit.ly/3edHPTb>

Rates of women's participation across different sectors

As highlighted above, even though there has been some progress as a result of feminist activism and campaigning over the years, women's equal participation across different sectors has yet to be achieved. On average, women hold 45% of the public administration positions but only 21 % of grade-5 positions, which are the most senior level roles.⁶ Across the public sector, women hold 22% of grade-1 positions, 46% of grade-2 positions, 46% of grade-3 positions, and 48% of grade-4 positions. In the judiciary, women's participation is close to equal of that of men, with 47.5% of positions held by women, according to data published by the Legal Agenda⁷. However less than 40 percent of criminal judges are women, whereas women make up more than 60% of judges overseeing civil cases. As for other sectors, women account for 3.6% of Internal Security Forces personnel and 4.7% of General Security personnel⁸. Concerningly, the participation of women with disabilities in the public sector is almost non-existent as they still suffer from stereotyping and stigmatization. This is in part due to there being no enforcement of their constitutional rights or of the domestic Law no. 220/2000 on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Lebanese Parliament has yet to ratify the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) which it signed in 2007. This is despite persons with disabilities accounting for 15% of the Lebanese society.

It is also important to highlight the under-representation of women in trade unions and associations according to a 2019 study⁹. For

instance, the Beirut Bar Association's Council only has one woman out of 12 council members. Similarly, the Tripoli Bar Association's Council in the North also includes one woman. The Beirut Bar Association was once presided by a woman in 2011. Unlike the North Association which has never had a woman president. The Beirut Order of Physicians has never been chaired by a woman since it was founded in 1946 and neither has the Order in Tripoli. According to 2019 data, 2 out of 16 members of the Order's Council in Beirut are women, while the Council in Tripoli has no women members, even though the rate of women physicians registered in the Order amounts to nearly 30%.

The Teachers' Syndicate has one woman out of 12 council members. No woman has ever chaired the Syndicate despite women representing 86% of primary school teachers and 60% of secondary teachers. Comparatively, the Order of Nurses is chaired by a woman and includes 8 women out of 12 council members. Women make up nearly 80% of registered nurses. The high number of women members in the Order of Nurses could be because of gender stereotypes which define the roles and jobs for women and men and view nursing as predominantly a women's job.

Lebanon's feminist movement bringing positive change

Women's low rates of participation across politics and various sectors stem from discriminatory legislation such as Lebanon's 15 personal status laws and entrenched gender stereotypes which view women as inferior to men and not being capable of filling leadership roles. Despite this, Lebanon hosts a broad feminist movement, which is leading to change. In particular, women's rights activists have been highlighting the issue of violence against women as an entry point to raise awareness of broader feminist and women's right matters. The feminist movement has played a key role in protests and calls for change, moving away from traditional calls and moving into social, environmental and economic. The feminist movement's demands during the 2019 protests included:

⁶ Sanaa Al Jack, Discrimination controls Lebanese women's participation in public affairs (التمييز يتحكم بمشاركة اللبنانيات), Asharq Al-awsat, March 2019, <https://bit.ly/3oJ29Rd>

⁷ Leen Abdel Reda, Infographic: Women in Lebanon... Turn Backwards (إنفوغراف: المرأة في لبنان... إلى الخلف دُر), Al Modon Online, May 2019, <https://bit.ly/34KoRjY>

⁸ Patriarchy and sectarianism: A gendered trap, baseline of women in politics: Lebanon case (Rep.). (2017). <https://bit.ly/38UTkhf>

⁹ Elda Al-Ghussein, The Lebanese woman in numbers: no "parity" yet (المرأة اللبنانية بالأرقام: لا «مناصفة» حتى الآن), Al-Akhbar Newspaper, March 2019, <https://bit.ly/34GE3yG>

- Upholding the full citizenship of Lebanese women;
- Abolishing all laws that discriminate against women and calling for the protection of women from violence without any discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, and nationality;
- Adopting a standard personal status law that ensures equality within families and puts an end to child marriage and domestic violence against women;
- Combatting and criminalizing sexual harassment;
- Abolishing the Kafala system which discriminates against foreign workers and puts them at risk of exploitation;
- Guaranteeing the inclusion of all women and girls across all decision-making processes including by adopting a gender quota for women parliamentarians; and
- Upholding the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) community, as well as those of people with disabilities and granting them the right to pass on citizenship, live with dignity, and be free from injustice and violence for all¹⁰.



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¹⁰ Lina Abou Habib, Women in Revolution: A Fourth Wave of Feminism?, Annahar Newspaper, March 2020, <https://bit.ly/34JtryT>

Section Two

A Gender Analysis of the Electoral Law

Contrary to what was initially reported on and hoped for, the Electoral Law no. 44/2017 is viewed by many as an impediment to women's political participation. It contains measures which continue to serve as obstacles to women's participation. Key issues of concern include, but are not limited to:

- **The absence of a gender quota for women;**
- **A new system of preferential voting and the flawed proportional representation system;**
- **The high registration fee for candidates;**
- **The high spending limit on electoral campaigns;**
- **The voter registration process;**
- **The Membership of the Supervisory Commission for Elections, and**
- **Media coverage¹¹.**

These issues with the Electoral Law are further analyzed below, as well as how they impacted the on the 2018 elections and results.

The Absence of a Gender Quota or Temporary Special Measures

The absence of a gender quota within the Electoral Law undoubtedly represents the largest obstacle to supporting women's meaningful political participation. While senior politicians had committed to the inclusion of a quota while the bill was being drafted, the final law adopted did not include one. Among the justifications used for its omission was 'the quota is an insult to women'¹². This however directly contradicts international experiences that affirm temporary special measures, such as quotas that reserve a number of seats for women, as being

instrumental in ensuring women's meaningful participation in elected bodies. Such quotas have been adopted by more than 86 countries around the world¹³.

Gender quotas seek to ensure a minimum level of representation of women as being necessary not only to promote gender equality and women's rights but also to ensure a genuinely representative democracy. Quotas and other special measures are a form of positive temporary discrimination which enable women to overcome structural and discriminatory barriers preventing them from engaging in electoral and political processes. A quota aims to ensure the participation of a certain percentage of women, whether by including them in electoral lists or by reserving seats for them in parliament. Temporary measures including quotas, usually remain in place until all obstacles preventing equitable female representation have been addressed and overcome¹⁴.

In 1997 Lebanon signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women¹⁵ (CEDAW) with some reservations on a few articles namely: Article 9 on nationality; some clauses of Article 16 regarding personal status; and Article 29 on inter-state arbitration. Despite it being nearly 23 years since Lebanon signed CEDAW, successive Lebanese governments have yet to take concrete measures to adopt an electoral gender quota promoting women's meaningful political representation.

¹¹ The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) issued a Monitoring Report on the Proceedings of the 2018 Parliamentary Elections, For review visit: <https://bit.ly/3sWh2lt>

¹² Lebanon Files, Riachi: Quota is an Insult to Women, January 2019, <https://bit.ly/3Ar7lyZ> | إهانة للمرأة: الكوتا النسائية الرياشي

¹³ Sabine El Hajj, As they reached an agreement... the idea of a "female quota" flew out the door, Al Joumhouria Newspaper, June 2017, <https://bit.ly/3ed44IR> | «الكوتا» وافقوا... وطارت «النسائية»

¹⁴ Report on Women's Participation in Parliament, LADE, <https://bit.ly/31WCdbE>

¹⁵ The Convention was issued in 1979 and entered into force in 1981

Many Arab countries have preceded Lebanon in adopting a gender quota in their parliaments, thus raising women's representation rate to a 25 – 35% range. Such quotas were implemented either in the form of reserved seats in legislative and local councils or by adding articles to electoral laws which provide for an obligatory percentage of women's participation in electoral lists. For example, Jordan's quota system reserves a number of parliamentary seats for women. Iraq adopted a minimum quota system in its electoral lists while also stipulating that, upon submitting the lists, the hierarchy of positions must follow a ratio of one woman after every three men. This ensures women winning a minimum of 25% of the seats. As for the special measure adopted by Tunisia, it does not reserve seats for women, but requires equal electoral lists and for one woman candidate to be named after each male candidate. This has resulted in Tunisian women currently holding 31% of parliamentary seats¹⁶.

The Introduction of a Flawed Proportional Representation System

In addition to the absence of a gender quota, the electoral law's introduction of a proportional representation system further undermines the chances of women, as well as minorities, to hold elected positions on an equal basis with men. The adoption of a proportional representation systems allocates seats proportionally across the different electoral lists based on the confessional and regional allocations. It reinforces, in different ways, the predominance of political parties already in power and these mostly do not encourage the nomination of women on their electoral lists.

Below is a brief analysis of articles relevant to Proportional Representation within the Electoral Law:

Article No.	Article Text	Effects
1 (The voting system and number of MPs)	The Lebanese Parliament consists of 128 members, whose term of office is four years, elected based on the proportional system of which the voting shall take place in public, in secret, and at a single session.	Despite adopting the proportional representation system for the first time in Lebanon, the law did not provide equal opportunities for the election of women.
2	The number of Parliamentary seats and their distribution across sects according to electoral districts shall be determined according to the attached appendix to this law (Annex 1). The nomination for these seats shall be based on this annex and the appendix shall be considered an integral part of this law.	In this context, the major problem lies in the distorted implementation of the proportional representation system within small and unequal districts, while also maintaining the sectarian quotas and adopting preferential voting. This presents additional obstacles for women in terms of receiving votes since the preferential vote goes to candidates with the most financial and political influence.

¹⁶ The "Quota" within Parties...The Best Way for Empowering Women Politically (ال«كوتا» في الاحزاب... الطريق الافضل) (لتمكين المرأة سياسيا), Maharat Foundation, July 18th, 2018, <https://bit.ly/32oNBTo>

Article no.	Article text	Effects
99	<p>The number of MPs taken from each list will be determined by the percentage of votes each list gains.</p> <p>The percentage of the seats earned by a list will be determined by the number of voters in each electoral district relative to the number of seats.</p> <p>Lists that do not receive a high enough percentage of votes to earn a seat will be eliminated and votes will be counted again after deducting the number of votes received by the said lists.</p>	<p>One of the main problems is the high electoral threshold that eliminates every list that does not reach the required electoral quotient of votes, which, in turn, undermines the effects of the proportional system, makes no changes to the status quo and prevents any female or male candidate who do not belong to the existing political system from reaching parliament.</p> <p>The present law sets the eligibility threshold for candidates equal to that of the electoral quotient which increases as the number of seats decreases. This leads to the marginalization of any political parties that receive a lower percentage in a certain constituency, thus depriving them of representation in Parliament.</p>

In general, legal experts argue that the proportional electoral system encourages the participation of minorities and women, as it provides a more just representation than other electoral regulations. Yet, despite the current Electoral Law utilizing a proportional electoral system, results closely resemble a majority Electoral Law, due to inclusion of a preferential vote. This limits electoral competition in many constituencies. Moreover, the division of constituencies is neither objective or standardized, but rather considers the political forces and the sects they represent. This results in two main problems. Firstly, the law does not provide uniform criteria on how to divide the constituencies and secondly, it perpetuates inequality in the number of allocated seats, therefore undermining the votes received by sectarian or partisan minorities in a given constituency.

The electoral quotient measure within the Electoral Law further critically weakens the proportional electoral system. The electoral quotient refers to the electoral limit or threshold

which must be obtained by an electoral list to win one or more seats. If a list fails to receive enough percentage of votes, as set by the electoral quotient, it is eliminated from the elections and wins no seats. The problem with the quotient appears to be twofold. First, the percentage of the quotient is not fixed. It differs based on the number of seats in the constituency. For instance, if a constituency has 5 seats, such as Saida/Jezzine (the smallest constituency), the electoral quotient is set at 20% of the total number of votes. As for the largest constituency, (Chouf/Aley), it holds 13 seats and its quotient is equal to 7.69% of the total votes. Second, the electoral quotient itself is high, although it changes as noted depending on the size of the constituency in question. As such, the high electoral quotient and the varying weight of votes, undermine the effectiveness of the long-awaited proportional representation system¹⁷.

¹⁷ Ali Mourad, How was the effectiveness of the proportional system undermined? (كيف تم تقويض فاعلية النظام النسبي؟), Legal Agenda, May 2018, <https://bit.ly/34lje5N>

The Preferential Vote

The single preferential vote which the electoral law also gave to the voters is considered as an additional obstacle facing women candidates. Women being included on electoral lists but then overlooked by voters due to social norms which often dictate a preference for male candidates.

This law has promoted political clientelism by dividing sects into separate constituencies instead of adopting a mixed electoral law. It also allowed for cash and in-kind services

that candidates could provide citizens with throughout the electoral campaign period, which further promotes political clientelism.

In addition, the electoral law reinforces the concentration of sectarian votes and guarantees the sectarian/ political influence of the ruling elite. New and lesser-known candidates, including women candidates, have limited chances to win, particularly if they lack wide networks or supporter base.

Below is a brief analysis of articles relevant to the preferential vote within the Electoral Law.

Article no.	Article text	Effects
98	Each voter is to vote for one list among those competing and is entitled to choose a single candidate from that list as their preferential vote in the respective minor electoral constituency.	<p>The concept of the preferential vote itself lowers women's chances of winning given Lebanon's prevalent dominant patriarchal culture which favors men to hold political positions.</p> <p>The preferential vote limits the choice of the entire list to only one of its members therefore undermining its unity and promoting competitions among its members.</p>
99	<p>After determining the number of seats won by each list, the candidates are ranked from first to last based on the percentage of preferential votes that each candidate received their respective minor constituency or in their district which is not composed of minor districts.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>The seats are distributed on winning candidates starting from the top of the list which contains all the candidates of the lists. The first seat is given to the candidate with the highest percentage of preferential votes, the second seat is given to the candidate with the second highest percentage regardless of the list they belong to, and so on until all seats of the constituency are distributed.</p>	<p>Ranking candidates according to the preferential vote without taking gender equality into account or without a quota, as is the case in some other countries, will disfavor women</p>

As per the above analysis, the preferential vote further disfavors women as voters only select one of the candidates on the electoral list to win the election. That is, if a list earns enough votes to win one seat, it is automatically given to the candidate with the highest number of votes on that list or the one heading the list. In both cases, men are the most probable winners, given the patriarchal culture which favors men for political positions. In addition, most male candidates are either former deputies or leaders of parties, meaning they are usually more popular among voters and receive more media coverage than less known women candidates. It is therefore extremely difficult for women to win the preferential vote over more established male candidates.

Some independent electoral lists, also known as civil society, lists, have listed an equal number of women and men candidates. This resulted in higher number of votes for women and highlights the importance of list composition and order. Women face challenges not only in being able to reserve a spot on electoral list, especially strong ones, but then to be placed sufficiently high enough on the list to have any chance of being elected¹⁸.

Since the electoral law does not specify how women candidates should be ranked on an electoral list, women candidates' risk being added on party lists as mere tokens with no feasible chance of winning a seat. In the last election, this was even the case for prominent nonpartisan women candidates who either had financial clout or were well-known individuals who could attract voters and raise the electoral quotient, such as media professionals. This reflects the parties' lack of trust in women even inside the party structure itself¹⁹.

¹⁸ Karen Tarabay, what stands in the way of 111 Lebanese women trying to reach the parliament? BBC Arabic, March 2018, <https://bbc.in/31YMPGh> / ماذا يقف في وجه 111 كارين طرييه، ماذا يقف في وجه 111 لبنانية للوصول إلى البرلمان؟، بي بي سي عربي، آذار 2018

¹⁹ Rania Hamzeh, Lebanese women emerge from the shell of political inheritance as they run for elections, March 2018, <https://bit.ly/34LxAm9> / رانيا حمزة، نساء لبنان يخرجن من قمع التوريث السياسي ترشحاً، المفكرة القانونية، أيار 2018

Electoral Spending Limits

Election funding regulations are an impediment to women being elected. These include the 8 million Lebanese pound nomination fee and high spending limits. The non-refundable nomination fee is likely to be out of reach for most women, especially considering women in 2014 only made up to 26 percent of Lebanon's total workforce.²⁰ The high expenditure ceiling during election campaigns further disadvantages women. Electoral funding limits are intended to prevent non-wealthy candidates from being disadvantaged in the electoral process, without forcing all candidates to spend the same amount.

The table below provides a brief analysis of some relevant articles in the Electoral Law relating to election funding regulation.



²⁰ Op.Cit. Lebanese women emerge from the shell of political inheritance as they run for elections من نساء لبنان يخرجن من قمع التوريث السياسي ترشحاً

Article no.	Article text	Effects
45	All candidates running for elections shall (...) attach to the application form (...) a financial receipt issued by the financial department of the Ministry of Interior confirming the deposit of the nomination fee which is eight million Lebanese pounds.	The nomination fee is high, and the law does not stipulate the possibility of being refunded even in case of withdrawing or not joining a list.
61	<p>The maximum amount that each candidate may spend during the campaign period shall be determined according to the following:</p> <p>The limit amount is composed of a fixed lump sum of one hundred and fifty million Lebanese pounds, in addition to a variable sum determined by the number of voters in the major electoral constituency in which the candidate may be elected, on the basis of five thousand Lebanese pounds per voter registered in the voter lists in the major electoral constituencies.</p> <p>The spending limit of an electoral list is a fixed lump sum of one hundred and fifty million Lebanese pounds per candidate.</p>	<p>The law allows each candidate to spend 300 million Lebanese pounds as a fixed limit (Combining the candidate's individual spending limit and their share of the list's overall spending limit), which equals approximately 200 thousand dollars²¹, in addition to 5000 Lebanese pounds as a variable limit, which equals 3.3 dollars per voter. This allows the candidate to spend an amount exceeding one million dollars in major electoral constituencies containing a large number of voters.</p> <p>The high spending limit does not guarantee equal opportunities between political parties and forces, nor between independent male and women candidates. It also privileges members of dominant parties and venture capitalists over the majority of women and new candidates.</p>
71	<p>Paid electoral advertising and publicity through media and advertising outlets shall be allowed.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>The media and advertising outlets shall abide by the price list and spaces that they provide and are not entitled to reject any electoral publicity requested by a list or a candidate working with them.</p> <p>(...)</p>	The law allows the media to impose very high fees for electoral publicity or TV appearances for any candidate. The law also prohibits media outlets from accepting any fee that differs from what is stated in the price list, including lower fees for less wealthy candidates.

²¹ All numbers in US dollars are according to the exchange rate i2018

Article no.	Article text	Effects
71	It is prohibited for the media and advertising agencies to accept free advertisements or accept a fee that differs from what is stated in the price list.	<p>This leads to exorbitant prices which exceed what many candidates can afford, including women candidates who are then reliant on free coverage but struggle to receive free airtime and coverage as well.</p> <p>According to an investigation done by LADE on the cost of electoral advertisement and publicity in the 2018 elections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a TV episode during prime time on most Lebanese channels cost approximately 100,000 US dollars and 40,000 US dollars for a TV episode during regular time. - Special packages for candidates including a specific number of appearances on political shows and others, in addition to special interviews for segments of newscasts, can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. -45,000 dollars for covering a live event for an electoral list or a candidate by visual media outlets. -10,000 dollars for a half-hour episode on most local radios. -Around 6,000 dollars for an electoral advertisement on news website pages. 2,500 dollars for an electoral advertisement on social media; and -roadside billboard advertisements start at 4,000 dollars for a specified period.

Given that elections are a costly political process in terms of advertising, launching electoral platforms, and promoting various policies and activities, it is not possible to consider equitable elections without also reconsidering the mechanisms which regulate electoral spending. As a result, many countries have adopted various regulations on electoral finances, or

laws imposing a limit for electoral spending by a candidate or a list in order to give all candidates equal opportunities²². Yet, this was reflected in the current electoral law which raised the limit to unprecedented maximum levels. Lebanon's

²² Electoral spending report, The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, <https://bit.ly/35PnOib>

current electoral funding regulations currently do not meet international standards.

Media Coverage

Articles 71 and 72 of the Electoral Law give the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE) a wide range of powers to ensure justice and equality in media coverage of candidates' electoral campaigns, to guarantee balanced coverage between candidates, and to encourage media diversity while covering elections. Equity requirements and the right of candidates to equal media coverage, as outlined in section C of article 71 of the electoral law, necessitate the implementation of standards that allow women candidates to be provided with equal media coverage as male candidates. However, a study conducted by Maharat Foundation during the 2018 parliamentary elections, showed the limited media coverage given to women candidates compared to the coverage given to male candidates²³. A further study by UN Women in 2019 showed the sexist language used against female candidates, as compared to men.²⁴ The reports suggest this reflected the common attitude within Lebanese society towards women in politics and which continues to favor men in political roles. Given the significance of media coverage in influencing the views of its readers, this significantly challenges female candidates.

Membership of the Supervisory Commission for Elections

Clause 2 of article 10 of the Electoral Law states that the representation of both genders shall be considered when choosing candidates for the membership of the Commission. The law

however does not state how many women should be appointed to the Commission and some have interpreted this as only needing one woman in the Commission as being enough to consider the representation of both genders²⁵.

Enabling people with disabilities to engage in the electoral process

While article 96 of the Electoral Law states that voters with disabilities may need the help of someone else or the head of the polling station to fill out their ballot, it makes no reference to decree 2214/2009 about facilitating the electoral process for people with disabilities. This gap in the Electoral Law overlooks the need to support people with disabilities to run as candidates; to serve as Ministry of Interior employees processing candidacy applications; to serve as heads of polling stations; or to serve as an observer thereby requiring different equipment, the removal of obstacles, and other logistical considerations.

Voter Registration

Lebanese citizens are registered to vote as families at their place of origin and not where they currently reside. Family groups are allocated to specific polling stations based on their confessional constituencies. Article 31 of the Electoral Law states that women's voting district will be transferred upon marriage which then electorally links women to their husbands and husbands' family and their electoral constituencies instead of being able to vote independently. This reflects gender discrimination in the law that should be addressed.

²³ The percentage of live coverage of female candidates in newscasts reached 3.46%, while the overall coverage of all candidates reached 96.5%. This means that women are marginalized and that newscasts did not help deliver women's voices in order for voters to be persuaded by them, trust them, and hence vote for them. This directly influences the concept of legitimate competition in elections. To read the report please visit <https://bit.ly/3qMyXZS>

²⁴ UN Women, Pursuing Equality in Rights and Representation: Women's Experiences Running for Parliament in Lebanon's 2018 Elections, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3gU1vyH>

²⁵ Three out of the eleven appointed members of the Supervisory Commission on Elections were women. However, one of the female members, Sylvana Lakkis, resigned and a male candidate was later appointed.

Section Three

An Analysis of the 2018 Election

This next section of the research paper provides an analysis of the 2018 election results and highlights how the measures within the Electoral Law contributed to women's limited success at the ballot box and in achieving more meaningful parliamentary representation.

Women only won 4.6% of seats even though they represent 50.8% of the electorate and close to 12% of the nearly 980 candidates who announced their candidacy.²⁶ Several women then withdrew their candidacy after not being able to join any electoral lists. Close to 40% of electoral lists did not include any women on them and in other lists the inclusion of women was considered as largely symbolic. Half of the women candidates received less than 230 preferential votes.

A Feminist Movement to Get More Women Elected to Parliament

Despite the flaws outlined above in the Electoral Law, the 2018 election saw an unprecedented level of enthusiasm among women who wished to take part in the electoral process. The introduction of Lebanon's first proportionality system contributed to this new enthusiasm as women were hopeful it would give them a greater chance of achieving meaningful representation in Parliament. In the lead up to the election, many feminist initiatives²⁷ were launched with the aim of increasing the number of women candidates and the

number of women elected.²⁸ While continuing to call for an electoral gender quota, women political activists and feminist organizations also campaigned on other key issues affecting women. A women's only electoral list was also formed in Akkar, known as the 'Akkar's Women's List' making it the first electoral list with only women candidates on it to ever be formed. One of the five women candidates on this list explained that this particular feminist movement had been active since 2009 and that associations and international organizations had been working hard to encourage women's political participation and for the adoption of a quota system.

Of the 113 initial women candidates, 27 of them withdrew when the deadline for announcing the lists expired as they were unable to secure a position on any lists. The final number of women candidates on lists was 86 women, approximately 14% of the final candidates. This is more than seven times higher than the number of women candidates in the 2009 elections. Unfortunately, despite a record number of women running as candidates, the results were similar to past elections. Six women (4.6%) were elected to Parliament in 2018, compared to 4 women (3.1%) in 2009.

Overview of the Women Candidates and the Six Women Elected

The women who presented themselves as candidates were on average eight years younger than male candidates. Women candidates were also on average more educated, with 90% of them holding postgraduate degrees, such as

²⁶ Several women then withdrew their candidacy after not being able to join any electoral lists.

²⁷ Lebanon witnessed many initiatives promoting women's political participation, including the "Fifty-Fifty" campaign (النصف بالنصف) which demanded equity in terms of candidacy within electoral lists and was organized by the National Committee for the Follow up of Women's Issues, in addition to other initiatives by the National Commission for Lebanese women, Women in Politics alliance, Women in Front, and others

²⁸ Paula Astih, Feminist enthusiasm to take part in parliamentary elections, Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, January 2018, <https://bit.ly/37VCq1V> بولا أسطيح، حماسة نسائية للمشاركة في الانتخابات النيابية، صحيفة الشرق الأوسط، كانون الثاني 2018

Masters or PhDs, compared to only 55% of men candidates. According to a 2019 UN Women report, 68% of surveyed women candidates had previous experience working in politics, 50% had their family's support in running for the elections, and 89% asserted that, should they win, their top priority would be to advance women's rights, support Lebanon's youth, and fight corruption²⁹.

With most political parties being reluctant to increase the number of women on their electoral lists, about 70% of the women candidates ran on nonpartisan or civil society lists. Of the 86 women candidates, only 9 women were on the six major parties' lists. In contrast, the Kulluna Watani lists, a civil society group, included 19 women candidates. This exceeded the total number of women candidates on the six major parties' lists.

There were women candidates running in all the electoral constituencies. The constituencies with most the greatest number of women candidates included:

- **The Beirut II constituency which had 19 women candidates across 8 different lists;**
- **The Maten constituency, in Mount Lebanon, had 9 women candidates on 5 different lists;**
- **The Tripoli-Minnieh-Donnieh constituency, in North, had 8 women candidates on 5 lists;**
- **The Beirut I constituency included 7 women candidates on 4 lists; and**
- **The Aley-Chouf constituency, in Mount Lebanon, had 7 women candidates on 3 lists.**

The constituencies with the fewest registered women candidates were:

- **The Zahrany-Tyre constituency, in the South, with only 2 women candidates on 2 lists;**
- **The West Bekaa-Rachaya constituency with only one woman; and**
- **The Akkar (North I) constituency, with only one woman on one list as well³⁰.**

Only one of the six women who won seats, media professional Paula Yacoubian, won on a civil society list in the Beirut I constituency. The other five won on the list of traditional political parties. Three elected women represent the Future Movement party, including Bahiya Al Hariri, who is the aunt of the Future Movement's leader Saad Al Hariri and sister of its founder former prime minister Rafik Al Hariri. The Future Movement party had nominated four women in total and 34 men.

Of the four women nominated by the Lebanese Forces party, only one woman was elected, Sethrida Geagea, the wife of the party's leader Samir Geagea. Minister Inaya Ezzeddine won a seat for the Amal Movement party. She was the only woman nominated for the Amal Movement. No woman was elected to represent either the 20-member Strong Lebanon bloc, which is supported by the President or the Free Patriotic Movement which had nominated two women and 46 men³¹. The Lebanese Kataeb party had nominated 2 women and 20 men, with neither female candidates being successful. Neither Hezbollah or the Progressive Socialist Party nominated any woman out of their respective 13 and 10 candidates.

Preferential Votes Received by Women Candidates

Concerns that the Electoral Law's preferential voting system would disadvantage women candidates were borne out at the 2018 elections. Figures released by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), indicate that of the 86 women candidates, 25 (29%) received less than 100 preferential votes, half of the candidates received less than 227 preferential votes and only two women candidates received more than 10 thousand preferential votes³². This demonstrates that even when women candidates had overcome

²⁹ UN Women, Women's Experiences Running for Parliament in Lebanon's 2018 Elections. <https://bit.ly/3gUivyH>

³⁰ Sami Atallah and Daniel Sanchez, Women's path to the parliament is fraught with dangers, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, November 2018, <https://bit.ly/3zOoKYN> | طريق المرأة إلى مجلس النواب محفوف بالمخاطر

³¹ Paula Astih, 6 women represent the Lebanese woman in the 2018 parliament, Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, May 2018, <https://bit.ly/37Snulk> / 6 نساء يمثلن المرأة اللبنانية في برلمان 2018

³² Elected female deputies infograph, Megaphone website, <https://bit.ly/2GepQPY>

the challenge of joining a list, their chance of being elected without any dedicated quota were still extremely slim, considering the patriarchal culture favoring male candidates.

Limited Media Coverage of Women Candidates

Women candidates also received little to no media coverage and therefore struggled to raise their profile within their electorate or to discuss their electoral platforms. Analysis undertaken by the Maharat Foundation, which monitored the media coverage of eight local television channels during the election period, found that female candidates received a mere 5 per cent of the total press coverage available and 15.8 per cent of Lebanese TV coverage during the electoral campaigning period. Women candidates represented only 0.87 per cent of the first story covered on TV news.³³ Women candidates did not appear in any paid electoral advertisements during the monitoring period. As highlighted above, the exorbitant advertising fees made paid media ads only accessible to wealthy and influential candidates who are predominantly all men. Women candidates were also mostly absent from media coverage which discussed key topics such as legislative and governmental affairs; the economy; the environment; infrastructure and telecommunications; security; human rights; social security; or employment. In addition, the increase in the number of women candidates was not reflected in the media coverage either. Instead, the media marginalized women candidates and promoted the stereotype that women are unqualified to enter politics³⁴.

³³ The first report on media coverage of electoral campaigns of women candidates (March 26 – April 8), Mharat Foundation / التقرير الاول حول التغطية التلفزيونية للحملات الانتخابية / للمرشحات (26 آذار – 8 نيسان)، جمعية مهارات

³⁴ Op.Cit. 2018 Parliamentary Elections Monitoring Report from a Gender Perspective



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Section Four

Challenges within Established Political Parties

When describing the political challenges hampering women's political participation, it is important to understand the patriarchal mentality and social norms that exclude women and limit their role to the private sphere. This is still the dominant societal view and is held by the vast majority of politicians and party officials and members. For instance, the justifications used by various political parties for not nominating more women ranged from voters preferring men over women, to stating that the work of elected officials does not suit women, considering they are required to participate in social duties such as attending weddings and funerals or resolve disputes in their electoral constituencies. Yet women candidates who were fully supported by political leaders did well for the most part in the elections. This indicates that voters are willing to vote for women candidates as long as they are endorsed by their party's leadership.

None of the major political parties are yet to be led by a woman. It is also problematic that within the majority of political parties, all of the decision-making is centralized around a few male leaders. This can lead to an unwelcoming environment for newcomers from outside the spheres of influence, especially women. The activities of women party members tend to also be limited to convening around women's issues rather than then being involved in broader policy discussions. Only two parties, the Future Movement and the Kataeb party, have adopted gender quotas in their bylaws.³⁵

Across most political parties, women's membership is incredibly low. According to a study on organizational requirements for enforcing women's participation in parties and

syndicates, by researcher Saada Allaw³⁶, in only one Lebanese political party do women make up 25% of its members, while another party stated that its membership contained two women. A third party stated that women did not participate as members but were supportive as wives and friends. The study also revealed that only a few political parties adopt any policies on issues which impact on women, or which seek to advance the status of women or their political or economic participation.



³⁵ Ibid. same reference

³⁶ Saada Allaw, Organizational Needs to Promote Women's Participation in Lebanese Parties, RDFL, 2014, <https://bit.ly/36cNFB5>

Section Five

Recommendations

This last section offers recommendations to improve and promote women's meaningful political participation in Lebanon. Not only is it important to amend the current Electoral Law, but it is also imperative that other discriminatory laws and practices also be addressed in order to overcome the obstacles outlined in this paper which significantly limit women's political representation. Political parties, unions, and the media, all have a crucial role in raising awareness on the importance of women's political participation and in implementing concrete measures to increase women's representation in parliament, in other decision-making processes and across employment sectors.

Amending the Electoral Law and Electoral Framework

The Electoral Law should be amended to ensure it promotes women's meaningful participation. This includes by adopting a gender quota, under an electoral law based on proportionality and not majority in electoral lists. This should be considered as a necessary transitional and temporary step to guarantee a certain percentage of women are elected to parliament, while not diminishing or weakening the value of those women elected, as some try to suggest.

From a legal standpoint, adopting the gender quota in itself will not be enough. The entire electoral system, including electoral constituencies, should be reformed to restore meaning to proportionality and ensure fair representation, to address the key issues of concern in the electoral law which have been detailed in this paper. Other amendments needed to make the Electoral Law more equitable include:

- **Amending the articles which set the candidacy registration fee at 8 million Lebanese Pounds. The fee must be reduced**

to a symbolic contribution that most women and youth can afford. In this context, the spending limit for electoral campaigns should also be reduced, as it has been proven to be too high, to ensure equality between among candidates;

- **Allowing candidates to vote in their constituency of residence rather than their place of registration. Such a step would boost voting rates and help overcome geographical and other voting barriers;**
- **Establishing an election management body that is independent from the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and in which women represent at least 50% of its members and cadres; providing it with powers to ensure a smooth electoral process; and for it to adopt policies aimed at ensuring the effective participation of women, youth, and people with special needs throughout the entire electoral process;**
- **Ensuring people with disabilities can meaningfully participate in the electoral process. As such, Article 96 of the electoral law must be amended to specifically reference executive decree 2214/2009 pertaining to facilitating the electoral process for people with disabilities and considering them as active members across all stages of the electoral process including as candidates, civil servants, heads of polling stations and their assistants, candidate representatives, and so forth; and,**
- **Developing and publishing in full transparency an election database, either within the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, or preferably at the independent election management body if established, which includes sex-disaggregated statistics, results, and information, and which is available to civil society organizations to review.**
- **Adopting a law protecting women from**

political violence including any act which is intended to deprive or prevent women from participating in political, partisan, or association activity;

- As per Law no. 220/2000, amending the candidacy processes set by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, to help increase the participation of women candidates with disabilities;

The role of political parties in promoting women's participation in electoral processes

Political parties can either play a positive role in promoting women's participation, or can present a further barrier to their equal representation, as was demonstrated by the last election results. In most cases, women's inclusion on electoral lists was merely tokenistic and without them having any real chance of being elected. Internal party candidate selection processes can further disadvantage women, particularly if they are competing against male candidates who already have established political profiles. Women are also largely absent from parties' political boards and leadership structures. It is imperative that women's political participation be strengthened both at the national and municipal levels. Assigning key party responsibilities to women in all regions and developing their capacity at the local level is a prelude to them being able to then confidently hold representative positions in ministries, parliament and other governmental bodies.

Political parties should therefore consider:

- **Undertaking a critical review of their role in promoting women's political participation and assessing the internal party barriers women may face in accessing leadership positions and electoral lists; elevating women's organizations within political parties to be able to influence internal policy making; and including women on their electoral lists in positions which could see them elected rather than in positions further down the list which are then considered as tokenistic nominations only;**
- **Establishing internal democratic structures which promote women's participation**

across all party levels and decision-making structures, and which accommodate for women's age, experience, and family duties instead of these restricting women's participation;

- **Establishing internal party quotas to ensure a minimum percentage of women in leadership and decision-making positions and establishing a separate quota for women candidates;**
- **Adopting policies promoting gender equality and women's rights, which seek to address the lived experiences of women, and which are central to parties political agendas; and mainstreaming gender perspectives across all party units, agencies, offices, and sectors; and**
- **Welcoming diverse women into party structures and moving away from only selecting elite women, including those related to party figures, as candidates.**

The role of unions in promoting women's inclusion and gender equality

As well as the specific recommendations outlined above for political parties with regard to the electoral process, political parties alongside unions also have important roles in raising awareness on the importance of women's participation across all sectors and in promoting gender equality. As part of this, political parties and unions should consider:

- **Including women's issues in their policy agendas and involving women in the drafting of all laws prohibiting discrimination against women and eliminating all current forms of gender-based discrimination in personal status, nationality, work, and social security laws;**
- **Facilitating meaningful consultations with women when developing policies to be included in political frameworks, including but not limited to those promoting gender equality and women's meaningful participation;**
- **Promoting women's participation in leadership positions, as well as working to dismiss negative gender stereotypes surrounding women in politics and the prevailing patriarchal mentality which**

currently prevent many capable and qualified women from reaching decision-making positions;

- Selecting women to represent the party and/or union in the media;
- Encouraging female members to present their candidacy for party/union council positions, and to occupy high-level positions, on equal footing with men. This particularly applies to unions which represent sectors where women make up a significant portion of the work force;
- Providing political education and leadership training for women and developing clear strategies to promote their participation in leadership positions;
- Establishing communication strategies and relationships between parties and unions and women's organizations operating in Lebanon to raise awareness among the local community of issues relating to gender equality and women's participation;
- Drafting internal documents for parties and unions to protect women against all forms of gender-based violence and sexual harassment;
- Establishing mechanisms for power rotation within parties and trade unions to guarantee true democracy;
- Developing internal mechanisms that ensure everyone's voices are heard in critical decisions and which include sex-disaggregated data on membership numbers and leadership positions;
- Holding national level debates on women's issues, with the aim of producing a legislative agenda pertaining to women's rights, strengthening women's representation in parliament, and which provide greater visibility and attention to legislative issues related to women;
- Providing specialized training on gender analysis and inclusion mechanisms across all sectors, committees, and political units, and developing economic empowerment plans for their female members;
- Developing appropriate policies to ensure women's opportunities for internal progression within parties and unions are not hindered by them taking maternity leave or from their other parental responsibilities; and

- Adopting a gender quota as a temporary measure, across all levels of political action

The role of the Lebanese media in promoting a more inclusive and equal society

As the fourth estate, the media also has responsibility for raising awareness of gender equality and for promoting women's rights and participation in public life. The 2018 elections particularly highlighted the importance of the media in this regard. In relation to the media, it is recommended that:

- The Supervisory Commission for Elections should consider imposing a limit to the number of paid spaces allocated for advertising and election propaganda, to then allow women and men candidates more opportunities to appear in free media election coverage;
- Media outlets should be encouraged to broadcast debates between men and women candidates without requiring financial compensation from the candidates;
- Media coverage and political advertising during elections should be regulated to ensure more equitable and neutral coverage, especially in light of the partisan nature of many media outlets;
- Media outlets should be encouraged to launch educational campaigns promoting human rights and gender equality and their importance to democratic societies;
- Media professionals and journalists should be encouraged to cover more stories highlighting gender issues, the status of women in Lebanon and their rights, and the challenges they face, along with their accomplishments, and to dismantle negative stereotypes associated with women in public life. As part of this, journalists should discuss the political agendas and opinions of women candidates and guests, instead of focusing on their personal lives or how they manage to reconcile their home-life and political activism, as was often the case in the last election;
- Women candidates should not only be granted the same amount of media space as men, but they should also be given an equal

voice as experts, in often male-dominated fields - such as politics, government, economics, business, war, conflict, science, technology, sports etc; and

Media outlets should focus on the role of women as economic, social, and political actors rather than restricting their roles and commentary to inferior or rigid social roles.

In addition to these specific recommendations, broader work is needed to create a more gender equal society in Lebanon, to try and shift patriarchal gendered norms that see women as secondary to men. In this regard, the following is being suggested.

The importance of a nation-wide government led strategy promoting women's rights and participation

As crucial and essential as the above recommendations are in anchoring women's political participation, a broader strategy is also needed to advance women's rights and gender equality across Lebanese society. The Lebanese Government should be encouraged to adopt policies and strategies that promote women's political participation, remove any hurdles undermining their ability to have meaningful representation and which promote women as equal citizens. As such the Lebanese Government should consider:

- **Drafting public gender policies and strategies along with national and local action plans, which are gender responsive;**
- **Teaching the concepts of gender equality and women and girls' rights as part of the national curriculum;**
- **Reforming laws to allow women equal citizenship rights and removing gender-based discrimination. These include amending the personal status and nationality laws, as well as the penal code;**
- **Adopting laws strengthening protection measures against all forms of gender-based violence and which enhance women's access to justice;**
- **Promoting an intersectional culture of human rights and gender equality at the national, regional and local levels, so that**

it reaches all segments of society, and which takes into account the additional disadvantages faced by women with disabilities and women from other minority groups, as well as the social factors and discriminatory practices hindering women's access to justice, traditional gendered stereotypes and prejudices, and gender bias;

- **Strengthening the institutional capacity of the national mechanism for the advancement of women, granting it jurisdiction and decision-making power, and providing it with the necessary human, technical and financial resources to operate effectively; and formulating a well-designed strategy to mainstream gender perspectives in all policies, programs, and laws. One of the objectives should be to achieve gender balance within security and judicial institutions, across all levels of seniority; and**
- **Fully implementing Lebanon's 2019-2022 National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda, which tackles women's political participation as one of its pillars.**

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- Media outlets should focus on the role of women as economic, social, and political actors rather than restricting their roles and commentary to inferior or rigid social roles.



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